

[Shi'hau]

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THE SAND KINGS OF OMAN

576 The woman whose fiendish caterwauling had brought the wrath
 562 of the tribe down on our heads, now appeared decently veiled, a large metal bowl in her hands. This was passed round the circle, each partaker making a sucking noise as he drank. It required some courage to put one's lips to the bowl after it had been licked by those bearded ruffians, but the camel's milk it contained was cool and sweet. A dish of dates, covered with flies, was next produced, and out of sheer politeness we helped ourselves to a small portion. They tasted of fermentation and were full of grit.

415 While we were seated with our strange hosts I looked around the
 316 hut and noticed several pots and pans, very crudely made of a yellowish metal. Lifting one of these up, I handed it to the headman and indicated with a gesture that I should like to know what it was made of. The old man pointed to the mountains and grunted 'ga'ar', which I found out afterwards was the Shi'hau word for gold. Apparently there are considerable veins of this mineral in the hills; it is smelted by the tribesmen who sell a proportion of it to the lowland Arabs, but also use it for their domestic utensils. Tin is also mined or washed in the streams.

576 When we could stand no longer the heat and stench of the hut we stood up and indicated to the headman that we should like to leave. He grinned very affably and, taking us by the hand, led us across the valley towards the crevice. The tribesmen followed, shouting and laughing and firing their rifles into the air. When we reached the top of the crevice we shook hands all round, a custom which they appeared to understand, and then thanked them in Arabic for their hospitality, which they did not understand, but which seemed to amuse them nevertheless. Just before we left them the headman unclasped his silver *hangar* from his waist and presented it to me. I have it still.

000 Our descent down the mountainside was much quicker than our ascent had been. We could hear the tribesmen's rifles cracking away in the valley, and feared that they might suddenly change their minds again and begin firing at us. Fortunately no untoward incidents occurred, apart from Stanton losing his foothold and falling twenty feet down a sharp escarpment, thereby skinning his arm from wrist to elbow. Within half an hour we had reached the base of the foothills and could see the Khan Sahib's house in the distance. The time was now five o'clock and I realized that the rest of the party would be getting somewhat impatient.

We found the Khan Sahib pacing up and down his beautiful

[Sharjah bazaar]

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252 a grid-iron, and placed directly on the glowing embers of the oven. Baked in this manner, the flat loaves of unleavened bread were crisp and brown in a few minutes, and tasted delicious. Arab children would crowd round the bakers' shop in little groups, fascinated by the dexterity with which the baker tossed the dough into the air with the ladle before consigning it to the fire.

326 In the quarter of the town where the tinsmiths and ironsmiths plied their trades, one could always be sure of finding something of interest. Here the shops of the blacksmiths exhibit all their primitive skill. A sheep's or pig's bladder is used as a bellows, and the fire, anvil and the blacksmith are all contained in a deep pit. Tools, nails, wrought-iron ornaments and domestic utensils are made in this crude manner from long iron bars, or 'scrap', which is imported from India. The tinsmiths are equally dexterous in the manufacture of pots, pans, kettles and bowls, the basic material for which is provided out of old R.A.F. petrol cans. Some of the tin bowls are extremely decorative, being washed in copper and engraved with a hand-beaten design.

[415] As we strolled away from the bazaar we encountered Hassan bin Ahmidfa, the young pearl merchant; he proved to be an excellent guide and companion, having a good sense of humour. He conducted us through a maze of alleyways until we came to the Street of Silversmiths, where wrinkled old men sat cross-legged, making their trinkets. Hossein, a white-haired smith with a beard and blue eyes, squatted over a hole in the ground filled with glowing charcoal. He kept this at the right temperature by means of a small sheepskin bellows. The silver he uses is made from rupee coins, which he melts down and then beats into thin wire.

306 He produced a tray full of semi-precious stones—agate, jade, chalcedony and jasper, some carved with Arabic inscriptions—which he uses as ring-settings. The stone Sparkes had chosen was a fine oval chalcedony with the words 'Mohammed bin Ali' engraved in old script. The setting consisted of a central hoop of thick silver, with two loops of twisted silver wire, hinged on either side. It looked barbaric, and the silver was rough and unpolished, but it made an effective ornament. I gave an order for a similar ring, to present to my wife, the cost being agreed, after some haggling, at five rupees.

294 Returning to the bazaar, we passed the tailors' shops, where
443 men sat cross-legged on little wooden stools, sewing by hand or by machine, and I was reminded of the cobbler's scene in *Chu Chin*

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Soldier, guide and statesman — but above all a connoisseur of the art of coffee-making. Good manners require that a guest sip down three cups of the bitter, black brew.

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433 PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY--productive capacity of the economy (e.g., actual and potential productivity of agriculture and industry); relative importance of various productive activities; economic supply (e.g., production of surpluses available for distribution); overproduction and shortages; restrictions on production; general statements on different types of economic activity. See also:

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INTRODUCTION

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231 Raschid of Al Ajman, horses are not kept in Oman on account of the difficulty of obtaining suitable fodder.

- 433 The industries of the Persian Gulf are pearl diving, fishing, a limited amount of canning for export, date cultivation, ship-building, ochre mining, and wool-weaving, but of these the pre-
 228 eminent industry is that of the pearl banks. In summer most of the
 464 able-bodied men repair to the pearl banks, some returning in November to take part in the fisheries, although the majority stay at home in idleness and are supported by means of loans advanced by the boat owners and contractors. Having 'subbed' on their next season's wages, they are legally bound to work for the same pearler, and the system is such that they are in effect bound to him for life. It is no uncommon thing for a contractor to claim the services of a son whose father has been killed by a shark, or drowned, in liquidation of the debt owed by the deceased diver, and the whole business starts again through the next generation.

[752] In July, 1944, I saw a diver who had been mauled by a shark eighteen feet below the water. His calf and the thigh of one leg had been bitten away to the bone, and he had spent five days in a dhow before being brought in. The wound, which had been soaked in henna, was very putrid and full of maggots. He was placed in the sick quarters and the maggots were allowed to continue their work of devouring the rotten flesh. Within six weeks the wound had healed up sufficiently for the man to go home. He said he would return to diving again as soon as he was well!

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721 Incidents like the above continued unabated throughout the century. In 1820 a general Treaty of Peace was signed, which included the submission of Sultan-bin-Sagr, Sheikh of Sharjah (who, on leaving the hospitality afforded him by the Sultan of Muscat, apparently took to piracy as a quick means of recovering his lost fortunes), and the Sheikhs of Dubai, Ras-al-Khaimah, Bahrain, and Abu Dhabi. Piracy abated somewhat in the next ten years, but in 1830 we hear of further attacks on British merchant ships, and depredations on shipping continued, in spite of severe reprisals and fines, until the end of the century.

It was the appearance of the steamship, with its greater speed, independence of winds, and heavier gun power, which really brought piracy to a close. The Arabs realized that it was suicide to attempt to pit their wooden ships and boats against modern sea power, and the few who stuck to piracy confined their attacks to smaller, unarmed sailing ships.

The establishment of order at sea was necessarily a gradual process, but by 1890 piracy had ceased to be a popular profession. There were sporadic outbreaks in the last few years of the century, and as late as 1905 a British merchant vessel was attacked. But the Wahabi influence had long been broken, the fight against iron-clad men-o'-war was unequal, and the old piratical tribes settled down once more to the safer occupation of fishing and pearl-diving.

Piracy is dead in the Persian Gulf, although isolated attacks on dhows still occur. As recently as 1944 a large Arab dhow, containing food supplies on its way to Dubai, was attacked by a native sailing ship and the crew murdered. The matter was immediately reported to the Political Officer, Captain Bird, who ascertained that the pirates came from a village on the Persian side of the Gulf, near Jask. Representations were made to the Iran Government, and it is believed that the culprits were apprehended and hanged, suitable compensation being paid to the dependents of the victims. To-day piracy is frowned upon by all sections of the community; even the sheikhs consider it is no longer respectable.

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501 Fishing and pearling have replaced the more violent forms of sea traffic, and shipbuilding remains an important industry on the Trucial Coast. The war has held up supplies of timber and sail-cloth, which came from India, but several large boats have been built from stocks of old material. The largest dhows, which sometimes sail as far south as South Africa and can easily make the passage

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TRUCIAL OMAN

439 and Dibai for their connivance in this traffic; in 1910 resistance was offered at Dibai to an armed party from H.M.S. *Hyacinth*, an encounter resulting in loss of life on both sides. Such illegal traffic satisfied the adventurous spirit of a maritime people, whose indulgence in buccaneering before the policing of the Gulf earned for their W. littoral the name of the Pirate Coast. But the establishment of the Arms Warehouse at Muscat (see Chap VIII, p. 247) has cut off the principal source of supply.

433 Local manufactures are few, and their products not sufficiently extensive to be exported. Fine sheep-wool abbas are made at Shārhah and daggers at Ras el-Kheimah. The latter are of the curved form universal along the Gulf from Koweit to the S., as also in parts of Western India.

RECENT HISTORY AND PRESENT POLITICS

631 The position of the five ruling Sheikhs is regulated by two agree-
648 ments with the British Government. The first, signed in 1853, provides for the cessation of hostilities at sea between the signatories, and imposes on Great Britain the duty of enforcing peace and obtaining reparation for breaches of it. The second, signed in 1892, binds the Sheikhs not to enter into correspondence or agreement with any power other than the British Government, not to permit the agent of any other Government to reside within their territories, and not to cede, sell, mortgage, or otherwise alienate to any other Government any part of their respective territories. The apparent effect of the two agreements is to place the foreign relations of the Sheikhs under British control, and to make Great Britain responsible for their protection should they be endangered through carrying out their obligations. In 1913 there was a certain apprehension, especially at Abu Dhabi, that the victorious Emir of Nejd might extend his conquests on the side of Oman. The number of Trucial chiefs recognized by Great Britain may at any time be increased. The Sheikhs of Ras el-Kheimah, Hamriyah, and Fujeirah are already practically independent. The sheikhdoms are very unequal in importance, ranging from considerable territories like those of Shārhah and Abu Dhabi to small districts consisting of little more than a single township and its environs. In the following sections the Principalities, or Sheikhdoms, are described in order from east to west.